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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 002232

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KS](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: JAPAN-ROK EXCHANGE "CANDID" VIEWS DURING
POLITICAL-MILITARY TALKS

REF: TOKYO 01448

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (B) (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. After a three-year hiatus, the resumption of Japan-ROK security talks is part of a broader effort to improve relations. Though somewhat stilted and formulaic, the talks helped move the relationship forward. The May 10 dialogue resulted in a "candid exchange of views," with both sides agreeing on most major points, Japan MOFA contacts told Embassy Tokyo. However, assessments of the current security environment in Northeast Asia differed significantly. The ROK views the security environment as improved, but Tokyo believes that "traditional" threats have been replaced by concerns of a new and different nature. Seoul reported it had told the DPRK that fundamental change in the North-South relationship would require progress in resolving the nuclear issue. Japan said it welcomed China's economic development but is wary of the "China Risk." Seoul also asked about the possible U.S. sale of F-22 fighters to Japan. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On May 14, MOFA Northeast Asia Division Deputy Director Shigetoshi Nagao provided Embassy Tokyo with a readout on the Japan-ROK Political-Military Talks, held May 10 in Tokyo between Asian and Oceanian Affairs Director-General Kenichiro Sasae and his ROK MOFAT counterpart Kim Jea Shin. Brigadier General Kim Byoung-gi, Vice Director, International Cooperation Bureau, Ministry of National Defense joined the ROK delegation, while Ministry of Defense, Defense Policy Bureau Deputy Director-General Hiranori Kanazawa accompanied Sasae. According to Nagao, the two men held a "candid exchange of views," with Sasae frequently addressing Kim without talking points. Nagao described the tone of the discussions as "more positive than we had originally predicted." Sasae and Director-General Kim, who had been scheduled to meet for three hours, extended their talks to five hours by talking through lunch. The two sides agreed on most issues, Nagao said, while noting contentious issues such as the Liancourt Rocks, scientific research in the Sea of Japan EEZ, and historical issues involving Yasukuni Shrine and comfort women had not been discussed.

¶3. (C) According to Nagao, Foreign Minister Taro Aso and Foreign Minister Song Min-soon agreed to re-launch the

security discussion, the sixth between the two sides but first following a three and a half-year hiatus, during March 31 ministerial discussions on Cheju Island, South Korea (reftel). During the Cheju event, Aso and Song also agreed to conduct two additional bilateral talks: DG-level meetings on Middle East and African policies (held on May 11) and DG-level talks on North America-related issues (scheduled to take place on May 19).

Northeast Asian Security

¶4. (C) During the May 10 security discussions, the most controversial issue was the two sides, respective assessments of the current security environment in Northeast Asia, Nagao explained. The ROK asserted that the regional security environment has improved since the end of the Cold War. Director-General Kim argued that regional dialogues have increased, and countries have become more interdependent. Conversely, Japanese officials argued that while "traditional" threats have decreased, they have been replaced by threats of a new and different nature. In the regional security context, Seoul asked about the possible U.S. sale of F-22 fighters to Japan. Without giving a direct "yes" or "no" answer, Ministry of Defense official Kanazawa responded that Japan was still in the process of selecting its next generation fighter.

North Korea

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¶5. (C) Sasae asked Kim to elaborate on the relationship between implementation of the February 13 Six-Party agreement and economic cooperation between the two Koreas. Kim replied that Seoul had tried unsuccessfully to include language linking the ROK's provision of rice to progress on DPRK denuclearization in the recent North-South agreement which provided food aid to Pyongyang, according to Nagao. Kim also told Sasae that Seoul has repeatedly told the DPRK there could be no fundamental change in the North-South relationship absent resolution of the nuclear issue, Nagao said. On the domestic situation in the DPRK, Seoul assessed that the Kim Jong Il regime remains stable and is not likely to undergo a change, Nagao noted. Kim also told Sasae the ROK military believes that DPRK military power remains a great threat to South Korea, Nagao related.

China

¶6. (C) Tokyo believes that China's economic development represents a great opportunity for Asia, Sasae told Kim. At the same time, Tokyo is wary of what Sasae described as the "China Risk." Japan and the ROK agreed, Nagao said, that China's economy, currently in the midst of a sharp growth spurt, "must have a soft landing" should any future downturn occur. Tokyo and Seoul also agreed that the PRC must do more to increase the transparency of its military build-up and budget. Sasae told Kim that PRC officials claimed to a visiting Japanese Diet delegation that recent increases in China's defense budget largely reflected spending for such items as pay raises and new uniforms. Sasae and Kim both expressed skepticism at the Chinese claim.

¶7. (C) COMMENT. After a hiatus of over three years during the chilly Koizumi years, resumption of security talks marks part of a welcome effort to improve relations. Though somewhat stilted and mostly scripted, it was a modestly productive start to what will likely be a long and difficult process of working through the difficult issues that raise tensions between Seoul and Tokyo.

